

FLEXIBLE FUND PROJECTS

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report provides the Council with an update on the proposals for the use of the £537,000 the Council has received from the Scottish Government (SG) under the Flexible Fund banner.
- 1.2 The purpose of the funding, available to spend in 2021/22, is to enable local authorities and their key planning partners including the third sector, to support the needs of people in their communities who don't have support networks and are struggling with COVID restrictions or guidance at protection level 4, particularly those most at risk through health or social inequalities.
- 1.3 Requests for project ideas to spend these monies and maximise the level of support for vulnerable people in our communities was issued via the Financial Inclusion and Advice Group (FIAG) and the Child Poverty Planning Group (CPPG). Both groups are key multi-agency advice groups FIAG is Council led and CPPG is led by Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP).

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 Council is asked to:
- Approve the plans to progress matters and the list of projects as set out in Appendices 1-3.
 - Agree that future amendments to the project programme and spend is delegated to the Executive Directors in consultation with Leader, Depute Leader and Leader of the largest opposition group.

3. DETAIL**Background**

- 3.1 In December 2020 the SG wrote to Scottish Local Authorities to inform them of funding they were making available to strengthen the local responses to people and communities to address the emerging tier 4 lockdown.
- 3.2 The purpose of the funding is to enable local authorities and their key planning partners including the third sector, to support the needs of people in their communities who don't have support networks and are struggling with the new restrictions or guidance at protection level 4, particularly those most at risk through health or social inequalities.

- 3.3 Argyll and Bute Council's initial funding allocation was £269,000 but this was doubled to £537,000 after a further notification received in March 2021. The monies are available to spend in the 2021/2022 financial year for the purpose outlined in paragraph 3.2.
- 3.4 Requests for project ideas to spend these monies and maximise the level of support for vulnerable people in our communities was issued via the Financial Inclusion and Advice Group (FIAG) and the Child Poverty Planning Group (CPPG). Both groups are key multi-agency advice groups FIAG is Council led and CPPG is led by the HSCP
- 3.5 A total of 20 project proposals were initially received however these have been further reviewed to take account of other COVID related monies and existing service improvement plans. Together these projects will deliver excellent value for money in our approach to support the most vulnerable in our communities to recover from the impact of the ongoing pandemic and tier 4 lockdown.
- 3.6 The SG grant funding letter expects a combined approach to supporting our communities and the proposals do show a good spectrum of support being led by the Council, the HSCP and the Third Sector.
- 3.7 Guiding principles have been developed by the SG and the Improvement Service to support local thinking about how funding can best be targeted and deployed. These include;

1. Joined up and proactive

Ensuring the services available are up to date and that seamless referrals are in place between organisations and services will help to meet whole needs, taking a 'no wrong door' approach.

2. Money advice

Getting money advice can help people make the most of their budgets and avoid financial difficulties. Reduced and insecure household income is leading people who previously would not have required it to seek advice.

3. Wellbeing approaches

Local authorities should consider what action is needed to maintain the wellbeing of people who are less engaged with services and those with complex needs, across their communities with careful consideration to the intersecting challenges.

4. Appropriate food provision

Some households may experience financial barriers and physical or digital barriers to accessing food concurrently. When a household would prefer direct access to food care should be taken to understand dietary and cultural needs, and the nutritional quality of

food. Where people do not have ready access to cooking facilities, such as those who are rough sleeping or being housed in temporary accommodation, the provision of meals and prepared food, rather than money to buy food, may be most appropriate.

5. Income based responses

Local authorities should consider income-based responses but have the discretion to respond based on preferences and needs of households and individuals. There will be circumstances in which an income based approach may not be suitable, including where there is household debt where payments into bank accounts can be absorbed by unauthorised overdrafts, or domestic violence or coercion. SG note that strong stakeholder representations have been made that direct financial transfers offer choice, accessibility and discretion in a way that vouchers or other in-kind delivery approaches may not.

In addition the following principles have been developed by Financial Services;

6. Anti-poverty knowledge and understanding

Local authorities should work with Community Planning Partners to upskill their staff, management and leaders in respect of developing their understanding of how to assist people who are experiencing difficult times or are in hardship.

7. Equity of service delivery for vulnerable customers across our area

The level of service being offered to claimants across Argyll and Bute should be of a similar level across all areas. Where there is differences work should be undertaken to bring about improvements to close any gaps in provision.

- 3.8 The £537,000 of funding is sufficient to deliver all the proposed projects based on current estimates with those estimates based on current information.
- 3.9 Expenditure for each project will be monitored closely to avoid any overspend whilst ensuring delivery of the maximum benefits to vulnerable persons in our communities through the projects identified.
- 3.10 It is proposed that the Council agree the allocation of funding to the projects outlined in appendices 1 to 3. If it becomes apparent that the any project cannot be delivered within the funding deadline, delegate authority to the Executive Directors in consultation with the Leader, Depute Leader and Leader of the largest opposition group to either vire money between projects or allocate to another project in line with the principles of the Flexible Fund.

Current Position

3.11 Exhibit 1 summarises the number of project ideas received, the range of the proposed cost of the projects split by lead organisation or sector. Exhibit 2 shows the number of projects and their value split by category of vulnerability. The projects range in cost from £3,250 to £140,000. Details in relation to proposed projects are shown in Appendices 1-3.

3.12 Exhibit 1 - Project Ideas by Lead Organisation/Sector

	Number	Cost (£)
Lead Sector/Organisation - Council	7	250,400
Lead Sector/Organisation – HSCP	8	185,000
Lead Sector/Organisation – Third Sector	5	101,600
Total	20	537,000

3.13 Exhibit 2 - Project Ideas by Vulnerability Category

Vulnerable Group	Number	Cost (£)
Children in Poverty	2	160,000
Adults, Older People and Carers	1	65,500
All Vulnerable Groups	2	60,400
Health Inequalities	1	50,000
Low Income Households	3	41,600
Adults with Substance Misuse Issues	1	40,000
Care Experienced Young People	2	39,750
Statutory Homeless	2	20,000
Young Carers	1	20,000
Older People	1	10,000
Single Parent Families	1	10,000
Women Suffering Domestic Abuse	1	10,000
Adults with Learning/Physical Disabilities/Mental Health issues	3	9,750
Total	20	537,000

Next steps

3.14 Finance relating to all projects will be controlled by the Council and recorded in the general ledger. Financial services will work with the HSCP and the third sector to ensure all expenditure is recorded accurately.

3.15 Project leads will be notified of Council approval or any changes that may be necessary to these plans as required and work will commence in order to start projects and deliver the expected improvements.

3.16 Progress across all projects will be reported by Financial Services to SMT quarterly and a final report prepared at the conclusion of the projects at the end of Quarter 1 in 2022/2023.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The Council, the HSCP and the third sector has come together to identify ways in which to use funds received from the SG to provide support for our communities via a range of projects to be delivered throughout the year. Together these projects provide wide ranging support reaching vulnerable people across our entire area and covering a full range of client groups. The work will commence shortly and shall be concluded throughout the 2021/2022 financial year delivering critical support services to vulnerable citizens following our time in tier 4 lockdown.

5. IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Policy – None
5.2 Financial – The grant payments of the value £537,000 are fully funded by the Scottish Government.
5.3 Legal – None
5.4 HR – None
5.5 Fairer Scotland Duty: None
5.5.1 Equalities – None
5.5.2 Socio-Economic Duty – None
5.5.3 Islands Duty – None
5.6 Risk – None
5.7 Customer Service – None

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Policy Lead: Councillor Robin Currie (Leader of the Council)

For any further information, please contact Fergus Walker 01586 555237.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Project Details – Council Lead (£250,400)

Appendix 2 – Project Details – HSCP Lead (£185,000)

Appendix 3 – Project Details – Third Sector Lead (£101,600)

APPENDIX 1 - PROJECT DETAILS - COUNCIL LEAD (£250,400)

Project Ref	Lead	Project Summary	Project	Vulnerable Category	Est Cost (£)
ABC001	Revenue and Benefits Manager (RBM)	Anti-Poverty Training	Funding to support Child Poverty Action Group to roll out Anti-poverty training for staff across Strategic Planning Partners, improve engagement with children and young people and harder to reach groups	All vulnerable groups	30,000
ABC002	RBM	School Clothing Banks	Establish school clothing banks in key towns serving multiple schools - grant to start up project buying new clothing for children and materials to use during the school day	Children in Poverty	20,000
ABC003	RBM	Free School Meals (FSM) top up	To help cover the cost of holiday hunger for families on low incomes. The Council must pay cash to FSM recipients for holiday periods in 2021/2022. The government grant for the Council is £205,000 however if the Council want to pay £3 per pupil per day (the equivalent payment made to pupils during holiday periods in 2020/2021) then the overall cost of the project is estimated to be £310,500. This project will allow the Council to pay FSM holiday payments to recipients at the same rate as approved by the Council in 2020/2021. Additional monies are set-a-side to allow for a potential increase in claimant numbers should benefit take-up increase throughout the year making more people eligible for FSM support.	Children in Poverty	140,000
ABC004	Community Planning Manager (CPM)	Protection of vulnerable adults from telephone fraud	<p>Purchase of a call blocker system to protect vulnerable adults from telephone fraud scams to supplement a "Cared for at home" network that has been set up by Police Scotland within our area. Impact of Covid and people at home has increased victims of telephone fraud. Targeting of vulnerable people is taking money and putting people into financial difficulty.</p> <p>This fund will tackle "Social Engineering Fraud" with scammers repeatedly targeting older persons to scam their savings. It is a partnership project with Trading Standards. 50 vulnerable adults are currently on Police Scotland's list of needing support having come directly or through the Council. We anticipate</p>	Older People	10,000

			a further 50-100 adults per annum needing this type of help. 100 units at £100 per unit, total cost £10,000. Impact of these can be monitored.		
ABC005	CPM	Support to Community Organisations and Village Halls	To run a fast track micro-grants scheme focussed on Covid-19 recovery. Applicants are community groups and other organisations as set out in the Council's Supporting Communities Fund requirements. Awards will be up to £500, and a focus will be on supporting village halls to re-open and other community-led recovery activities.	All vulnerable groups	30,400
ABC006	Housing Lead Operations (HLO)	Starter Packs for Housing New Tenants	Monies to be made available to voluntary groups that provide "Starter Packs" (i.e. bedding, pots, crockery) for people in need going into new tenancies.	Statutory Homeless	8,000
ABC007	HLO	Provision of Internet Access for homeless tenants	Monies to be made available to provide internet access to Statutory Homeless applicants, in order that they can link into service appointments, provide assistance with home schooling etc.	Statutory Homeless	12,000
TOTAL					250,400

APPENDIX 2 - PROJECT DETAILS - HSCP LEAD (£185,000)

Project Ref	Name	Project Summary	Project	Vulnerable Category	Est Cost (£)
HSCP001	C&F SIO	Support for Women's Aid	<p>Funding for Women's Aid to provide additional psychotherapy work for women traumatised by their experiences in lockdown. This action will benefit their children who have shared these lockdown experiences.</p> <p>Funding for Rape Crisis to purchase more worker hours to work with vulnerable women and young people affected by lockdown. Also to purchase support packs for women and children and two laptops for staff in order to facilitate work with traumatised women and children who can't be contacted directly due to Covid.</p>	Women Suffering Domestic Abuse	10,000
HSCP002	C&F SIO	Support for Young Carers	Funding to support third sector organisations that support Young Carers in Argyll and Bute. Lockdown for a child or young person with a caring role will have been particularly stressful. They may have been 24/7 looking after a disabled parent or sibling or possibly supporting a parent with mental health issues. If such organisations had some funds they could help to fund activities / provide more staff hours to this group following lockdown.	Young Carers	20,000
HSCP003	Senior Development Worker, Phoenix, Rothesay	Hardware and Wi-Fi Project - Rothesay	<p>Funding for Wi-Fi access as premise does not have access to basic WIFI which means it can't provide simple video calls to communicate with the people being supported. The majority of the people supported have issues with using the phone for many different reasons such as hearing loss or lack of understanding. The majority of them also need to see the person talking to them in order to gauge facial expressions. There are devices to carry this out however they are rendered useless without efficient internet.</p> <p>The typical day support model is under a redesign at present, part of this will be starting up a "buddy up programme" locally and with North Ayrshire HSCP. Through this it is hoped to give people the opportunity to make more friendships and not feel as isolated with virtual coffee morning and deliver online sessions/ classes tailored to the needs of the supported people. It will</p>	Adults with learning disabilities, physical disabilities and/ or mental health diagnoses	3,250

			also give the staff teams the chance to access online learning and share ideas with colleges from other areas. This project can only be achieved if we can get access to the internet.		
HSCP004	Interim Registered Manager, Lorne Resource Centre	Hardware Project for those with disabilities and mental health issues	<p>Funding for tablets to allow the service to move forwards and continue to support individuals with a wide range of abilities to remain connected with their peers and friends post-lockdown. Presently the service offer opportunities to approximately 25 adults (19 to 70 years) with a range of learning disabilities, physical disabilities and/ or mental health diagnoses, so staying connected to their peers and communities is vital for overall health and wellbeing, especially at this time and moving forwards.</p> <p>It would also enable more effective working with individuals in transition from secondary school, by offering a non-threatening and familiar platform to engage through and one which the majority of young people are familiar and comfortable using, thus building on already accomplished skills for many individuals.</p>	Adults with learning disabilities, physical disabilities and/ or mental health diagnoses	3,250
HSCP005	Senior Development Worker, Woodlands Centre	Hardware and Wifi Project - Campbeltown	<p>Supporting people with Learning Disabilities by purchasing laptops or tablets for the service to encourage face to face contact with people again. Also to upgrade the Wi-Fi system to enable more areas within the building to have Wi-Fi spots and quiet places for the people we support to hold conversation without interruption.</p> <p>This would also enable delivery of virtual classes through college again, something everyone has really loved in the past and missed over this last year.</p> <p>At the moment there are limited people using the service due to the restrictions and support is only available for the people who are in critical need of in-house support.</p>	Adults with learning disabilities, physical disabilities and/ or mental health diagnoses	3,250

			If this facility is in place it would allow the hosting of online groups and encourage, community connections, face time with friends and the staff team who have supported them for so many years.		
HSCP006	Interim Clinical Service Manager Mental Health and Addictions / Community Addictions Nurse/Team Leader	Sporting Community Reintegration for those experiencing Substance Misuse	<p>Funds to support community reintegration of those accessing substance misuse services (both statutory and third sector) in Argyll and Bute. Isolation and stigma can be isolating factors already with this client group and this has certainly been exacerbated by lockdowns.</p> <p>Funding shared across four localities to established third sector providers as grants to increase and build up local response and service.</p> <p>To be confirmed;</p> <p>Dunoon Rape Crisis Helensburgh Welcome inn Oban Hope Kitchen Lomond Advocacy – Bute & MAKI</p>	Adults with substance Misuse Problems	40,000
HSCP007	C&F SIO	Gym and Leisure Memberships for Care Experienced Young People	<p>Care Experienced young people, both currently in care and those being supported, have been significantly affected by lockdown and Covid. It has impacted on the physical and mental health and their life changes and employability.</p> <p>Gym and leisure passes would allow young people to become socially active again and improve their physical and mental health. This would create a fund that could be accessed for the well-being of young people by the Through care Team, Managers of Children’s Houses and the Fostering and Adoptions Manager.</p>	Care Experienced Young People	33,750

	C&F SIO	Provision of Driving Lessons and Provisional Licences for Care Experienced Young People affected by lockdown.	<p>Care Experienced young people, both currently in care and those being supported, have been significantly affected by lockdown and covid19. It has impacted on the physical and mental health and their life changes and employability.</p> <p>The provision of funds to provide driving lessons and provisional licences for 20 young people would have multiple benefits. It would help them to compete more effectively in an employment market which has become smaller for 16-24 year olds; even without the additional difficulties that care experienced young people face. It would be particularly beneficial to those young people who live remotely and rurally. They face additional barriers in terms of accessibility for both social and employment opportunities and helping them to address these would provide substantial benefits. The amount requested is £6,000, this to cover 10 blocks of 20 driving lessons and 20 provisional licences.</p>	Care Experienced Young People	6,000
HSCP008	LCurrie/Physio Leads	HSCP Increasing Activity	Increasing activity/socialisation split into 6 locality pots, match funded from other HSCP budgets. Collaboration between local Allied Health Professionals (OT, Physio & Dietetics), leisure services (Live Argyll & LOHO or other local groups) and carer centres. Developing local projects for those who have struggled to socialise and become deconditioned-all adults eg. frail, young mums either at home or in community venues.	Adult/Older People/Carers	65,500
TOTAL					185,000

APPENDIX 3 - PROJECT DETAILS - THIRD SECTOR LEAD (£101,600)

Project Ref	Name	Project Summary	Project	Vulnerable Category	Est Cost (£)
TS001	ALlenergy	Provision of fuel vouchers for Pre payment energy customers.	<p>ALlEnergy have partnered with the Fuel Bank Foundation to access fuel vouchers for pre-payment energy customers. Pre-payment customers are extremely vulnerable to fuel poverty, when the credit and emergency runs out on their meter they have no access to heat or light. Unlike credit meter customers they often pay more during winter to keep the heating on and can't access supplier discounts for direct debits and online billing. These credit customers will still have access to heat and light if bills are not paid. Some vulnerable fuel poor households wish to remain on pre-payment meters because they are worried about incurring large energy bills which they can't afford. Pre-payment meters help them to ration their energy use to what they can afford, with many reporting they don't use any heating in the days leading up to their next top up because they need to make the credit in the meter last until they get money.</p> <p>Fuel vouchers are issued same day or within 24 hours. (£49 during winter and £30 in summer). There is a £7.50 admin fee per voucher. The value of the voucher is covered by SG funding, however we need to pay the admin costs. The Flexible Food Fund has covered admin costs for Flexible Food Fund applicants so we are seeking funding to access these vouchers for all eligible clients. £5,000 would provide admin costs for at least 600 vouchers worth a total of £29,400. In the first 6 weeks of accessing these vouchers 97 were redeemed helping 135 people (77 adults, 58 children). The vouchers are a vital lifeline for fuel poor pre-payment customers. ALlenergy provide energy advice alongside issuing the voucher so that clients can maximise the voucher value and access other support they are eligible for.</p>	Low income households	5,000

TS002	ALlenergy	Home Heating Support Fund - Argyll and Bute.	In Feb 2021, the SG launched a £4m Home Heating Support Fund awarding householders financial help with fuel debt and current usage. This fund will close on 31 March 2021. This fund has been extremely generous and helped people clear balances so they can concentrate on paying for their current usage. This has had a huge positive impact on people's mental health and wellbeing. Strict eligibility and a maximum award would need confirmed to use the funding to help as many as possible.	Low income households	20,000
TS003	ALlenergy	Home Start Essentials Fund	<p>A fund for low income single parent families to access financial support for essential items such as cots, beds, prams, help with food and fuel bills. Single parents bear the burden of all parental responsibility-financial, emotional, caring, cooking, cleaning, learning and keeping the home safe and warm.</p> <p>ALlEnergy recently accessed Home Start's Winter Fund to access funds for families they are working with to help with essentials including, increased heating bills over winter while home-schooling, purchasing a new toddler bed and purchasing clothes and shoes. Home Start's Winter Fund had a pot of £4,000 which was allocated within a number of weeks. Max award £250.</p>	Single parent families	10,000
TS004	ALlenergy	Fuel Support for Persons with Cancer Diagnosis	People living with cancer experience increased energy bills while remaining at home during treatment and recovery, usually at the same time as their income falling too. The physiological effects of cancer require patients stay warmer at home. The project would enable the provision of new heating systems/replacement boilers/hot water systems for vulnerable people– all with a cancer diagnosis – most of whom are not eligible for support from other schemes. Potential to draw in other funding such as Industry Initiatives strand of the Warm Home Discount.	Health Inequality	50,000
TS005	Bute Advice Centre, ALlenergy and NHS	Flexible Fund Pop Up Roadshows	BAC & ALlEnergy to work with partner agencies and networks (e.g. Argyll & Bute Council, Argyll & Bute Community Food Forum, NHS Highlands Health Improvement Team) to create and run a series of roadshows	Low income households	16,600

		<p>throughout Argyll and Bute designed to help the public with any issues that they may face with money, debt, fuel advice, health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Qualified, experienced staff to provide:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Public information events 2. Front line professional sessions 3. One to one advice sessions <p>At each of the following locations: Bute, Cowal, Helensburgh, Arrochar, Rosneath, Islay, Jura, Colonsay, Gigha, Coll, Tiree, Kintyre Oban, Mid-Argyll, Mull and Iona.</p> <p>The level of support provision will be scaled up and down in line with anticipated demand but it is critical that every community within the region is given the opportunity to raise questions and receive support and assistance. Giving direction at the public event to services available and encouraging referrals. Paying particular attention to the most vulnerable and those whose circumstances have been adversely affected by the pandemic, with little or no knowledge of the welfare benefits system.</p> <p>Providing support and information to professionals who could refer potential clients, e.g, GPs, Health Visitors, Social Workers, Landlords, Teachers etc</p> <p>Provision of advice sessions to individuals who require support to access benefits, grants and rebates, support with money advice issues or energy issues.</p> <p>Travelling on the ferries would offer an ideal opportunity to advertise services and information to travellers on board. Using roller banners and setting up information hubs where individuals can pick up leaflets or come and chat for general information. For more confidential sessions</p>		
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		<p>appointments could be made at the designated location or telephone appointments. This would need to be approved by CAL MAC.</p> <p>An advertising campaign prior to the roadshow including newspaper articles, radio shows and social media would raise the profile of the events. This project would be used to gather information and assess the level of demand to all consideration of longer term funding to link organisations who work with vulnerable people (e.g. Food banks, homestart) to income maximisation services and to potential create more regular "one stop shops" in community hubs.</p>		
TOTAL				101,600